

Lesson
7

Avoiding Double Negatives

Teaching

A **negative** is a word that implies that something does not exist or happen.

Common Negative Words

barely	never	none	nothing	can't
hardly	no	no one	nowhere	don't
neither	nobody	not	scarcely	hasn't

If two negative words are used where only one is needed, the result is a **double negative**. Avoid double negatives in your speaking and writing.

Nonstandard Hardly no one believes me when I tell my story.

Standard No one believes me when I tell my story. *or* Hardly anyone believes me when I tell my story.

A. Recognizing the Correct Use of Negatives

Circle the letter of the sentence from each pair that uses negatives correctly.

- a. I wasn't looking for no trouble that night.

b. I wasn't looking for any trouble that night.
- a. I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw the space ship.

b. I couldn't hardly believe my eyes when I saw the space ship.
- a. I can't understand anything the aliens are saying.

b. I can't understand nothing the aliens are saying.
- a. Nobody never expects to be taken aboard an alien ship.

b. Nobody ever expects to be taken aboard an alien ship.

B. Avoiding Double Negatives

Underline the word in parentheses that correctly completes each sentence.

- I had never seen (no, any) aliens before that strange night.
- At first, my friend and I didn't see (anything, nothing) unusual in the sky.
- You wouldn't (ever, never) guess what happened around nine o'clock.
- When a spaceship landed, I (could, couldn't) scarcely believe it myself.
- I had never believed (anyone, no one) who said he or she saw an alien.
- Yet, there it was, looking at me and making gestures that I couldn't (ever, never) understand, as if it was trying to communicate.
- I was confused, and my friend couldn't make out what the little creature was saying (neither, either).
- In scarcely (no, any) time at all, the alien climbed back in its ship and disappeared.
- I never told (nobody, anybody) that I saw the alien that night.
- I can see that you (can, can't) hardly stop yourself from laughing, but I swear it's all true.

**Lesson
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Underline the correct word in parentheses in each sentence.

1. I haven't heard of (none, any) of those songs you mentioned.
2. You (haven't, have) never been to a concert?
3. She can't go (anywhere, nowhere) without taking her cell phone.
4. The doctor (hasn't, has) scarcely even touched you with the needle.
5. Haven't you been to the new museum yet (neither, either)?
6. When I turned around I didn't see (no one, anyone) behind me.
7. People in some parts of the United States haven't (ever, never) seen snow.
8. He (could, couldn't) hardly see the performance from where he was sitting.
9. My brother can't drive (nowhere, anywhere) without getting himself lost.

B. Avoiding Double Negatives

Rewrite each sentence to avoid double negatives.

1. There wasn't no one else around when the spaceship landed.

2. I discovered that I understood the alien even though it wasn't making no sound.

3. I hadn't never seen a creature so strange before.

4. I don't think I can hardly describe the inside of the spaceship.

5. The glowing metal control panel wasn't like nothing I'd ever seen on Earth.

Lesson
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Choose one word from each pair of words to complete each sentence below. Be sure to avoid double negatives. Cross out each word pair after you have chosen your word.

anything/ nothing	any/ no	anyone/ no one
can/ can't	had/ hadn't	ever/ never

1. I was disappointed when I didn't see _____ about aliens on the TV news.
2. The police never had _____ reports about unusual activity that night.
3. I _____ never been so scared as when I saw that alien.
4. I never told _____ about my experience on the alien ship.
5. I can't _____ describe my surprise at being taken aboard.
6. I _____ scarcely picture sharing our planet with an alien life form.

B. Revising a Paragraph with Double Negatives

The following paragraph contains several double negatives. Read each sentence and decide if it has a double negative. If it does, rewrite it correctly on the corresponding line below. If it is correct, write Correct on the corresponding line.

(1) My sister hasn't never missed an alien movie. (2) She loves anything alien, and you can't scarcely see her bedroom wall because of all the alien-related posters. (3) However, she doesn't like it when the aliens are portrayed unjustly as evil. (4) She would love to become a scientist and try to prove that people haven't nothing to fear from aliens. (5) I don't believe aliens want to take over our planet or destroy our kind neither. (6) In fact, no one can't really prove anything about aliens at all yet. (7) My sister and I know that some people don't believe in the existence of aliens. (8) Even so, we won't let nobody stop us from enjoying stories about extraterrestrial life.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____